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TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD
Commission on Enterprise, Business Facilitation and Development
Expert Meeting on the Use of Information Technologies
to make Transit Arrangements More Effective
Geneva, 5 May 1997
Agenda item 3

USE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES TO MAKE TRANSIT ARRANGEMENTS MORE EFFECTIVE

Recommendations of the Expert Meeting to the Commission on Enterprise, Business Facilitation and Development[1]

Background

1. The Expert Meeting recalled that, despite the rapid progress in information technology, customs transit continues to be largely based on procedures involving the transmission of paper documents.

2. The Meeting stressed the crucial contribution of information technology to the proper functioning of customs transit systems. The Meeting also noted that, although automation could not be considered as a panacea for the solution of all transit problems, such systems could have a positive impact on improving transit operations. Nevertheless people rather than machines remain crucial for the proper functioning of customs transit. This in turn requires an adequate legal and procedural basis, as well as a proper system of guarantees. Customs administrations must have adequate manpower and facilities and be committed to combating fraud, smuggling and corruption in all its forms. The Meeting noted

[1] Adopted by the Expert Meeting at its closing plenary meeting, on 7 May 1997.

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9. The Meeting recognized the need for a comprehensive Customs transit system and an integrated cargo tracking system open to all operators. The Meeting also recognised that UNCTAD should pursue its support for current users of ASYCUDA and ACIS and pursue the development and further implementation, including the promotion and ongoing support for both systems.

that the "backbone"of transit information systems should include, inter alia, several features: on the one hand specific data on operators and modes, customs regimes, nature of cargo; on the other hand data on common basic features per consignment.

3. The Meeting also underlined that transport information systems to track transit cargo should be further enhanced with a view to automating data capture. The current lack of such systems in many countries jeopardizes the efficiency of transit transport operators; and it is also detrimental to the efficient performance of customs transit systems.

4. The Meeting recalled the use of UNCTAD's Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA) and Advance Cargo Information System (ACIS) in many countries at different levels of development. It agreed that the computerization of transit procedures could significantly contribute to speeding up the procedures and reducing their cost, for the benefit of trade, while enhancing the efficiency of Customs controls and cargo tracking. At the same time, however, it believed that only through cooperation with other organizations - e.g. The World Customs Organization (WCO), the European Commission and other regional groupings involved in similar initiatives - could maximum benefits be realised.

Recommendations

5. The Meeting believed that UNCTAD should, in cooperation with all other interested parties, work towards developing a transit module, in the context of ASYCUDA and ACIS, which would incorporate the structure of messaging systems outlined in the paper "Use of information technologies to make transit arrangements more effective" (TD/B/COM.3/EM.1/2 and Add.1).

6. The Meeting considered that the transit module could cover all functions of Customs control and transport monitoring of transit goods from the beginning to the completion of the transit operation, including the release of securities where appropriate. It should be open to similar computerized systems and, to the extent permitted by national laws, it should permit relevant access by trade and transport operators. Messages used should be based on existing international standards, in particular UN/EDIFACT. A group of countries both transit and land-locked, with a priority on LDCs, could be targeted to act as pilot sites for such an electronic transit module. Furthermore, the possibilities offered by localization techniques such as Global Positioning Systems (GPS) could be investigated for eventual use.

7. The Meeting also considered that UNCTAD should cooperate with the organizations involved in the development and maintenance of transit systems, in particular The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the European Commission, regional groupings in developing countries as well as relevant public and private sectors.

8. The Meeting considered the importance of strengthening technical cooperation in favour of developing countries, in particular of the least developed, to benefit from the progress in using information technology for customs transit.